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Thirty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 3 June 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. PIRIZ-BALLON (Uruguay)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (DP/1991/L.7; DP/1991/BFC/L.1; DP/1991/SCPM/L.1; DP/1991/8 and 9)

1. The PRESIDENT said that, in view of the recent developments in the Persian Gulf region, the Bureau had decided to recommend that the Governing Council should include in its provisional agenda an additional item entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people", without prejudice to the decision concerning the biennialization of the item. If the Council agreed, the item would be considered under agenda item 3, entitled "Special programmes of assistance".

2. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council wished to adopt the agenda as contained in annex I to document DP/1991/L.7 and to include an additional item entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people", which would be considered under agenda item 3.

3. The agenda was adopted.

4. The PRESIDENT said that annex II to document DP/1991/L.7 contained the tentative schedule of work that the Governing Council had adopted in February. However, since then, the Bureau had reviewed the tentative schedule of work in the light of several developments, and had agreed to submit a number of changes to the Council for its consideration.

5. Mr. KIRDAR (Secretary of the Council) read out the proposed changes to the tentative schedule of work.

6. Mr. ROHNER (Switzerland) said that, in his view, items 4 (c), entitled "National execution", and 5 (c), entitled "Support costs: successor arrangements", should be discussed in the Standing Committee for Programme Matters before they were discussed at a plenary meeting of the Governing Council.

7. After a procedural discussion in which Mr. SAHLMANN (Germany), Mr. PETTITT (United Kingdom), Mr. LUKABU KHABOUJI N'ZAJI (Zaire), Mr. KIRDAR (Secretary of the Council), Miss JANJUA (Pakistan), Mrs. DUDIK GAYOSO (United States of America), Miss HASSAN (Observer for Egypt), Mr. DRAPER (Administrator), Mr. MORALES CARBALLO (Cuba), Mr. AL-FAIHANI (Observer for Bahrain), Mr. KELLAND (Denmark), Mr. SAHA (India), Mr. CARVALHO (Brazil), Mr. SOUTTER (Canada) and Mr. FLEMMING (Saint Lucia) took part, the PRESIDENT suggested that, as there was no agreement on the proposal made by the Observer for Switzerland, the Council should defer a decision until informal consultations had been held.

8. The PRESIDENT said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed to adopt the tentative schedule of work as set out in document DP/1991/L.7, with the changes submitted by the Bureau.

9. It was so decided.

10. The PRESIDENT stressed that meetings of the Governing Council would begin punctually. In view of the critical financial situation of the United Nations, meetings could not be extended, and additional evening or night meetings could not be scheduled. In accordance with Governing Council decision 89/1, and in view of the large number of members and observers wishing to participate, the time-limit of 10 minutes must be strictly observed by speakers during the general debate. Information concerning the status of documentation was contained in document DP/1991/9.

11. The Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD), both of which cooperated closely with UNDP, had requested permission to participate in the meetings of the Governing Council. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed that they could attend meetings at which questions of interest to them were considered.

12. It was so decided.

13. The PRESIDENT drew attention to Governing Council decision 91/1, section VIII, in which the Council reaffirmed the principles which should guide the deliberations of the Drafting Group. Those principles had been adopted in Governing Council decision 83/1, and were reproduced in paragraphs 16 and 17 of document DP/1991/L.7.

14. Mr. DRAPER (Administrator) reaffirmed the importance of the thirty-eighth session, at which a number of significant decisions would have to be taken. He was confident that a spirit of consensus would prevail during the session and that the Council's efforts would prove meaningful to the developing world. He wished to welcome Mr. Ji Chaozhu, the new Under-Secretary-General for Technical Cooperation for Development, to his first session of the Governing Council. UNDP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Department of Technical Cooperation for Development would make every effort to facilitate the deliberations of the Governing Council.

15. Mr. JI Chaozhu (Under-Secretary-General for Technical Cooperation for Development) said that he looked forward to cooperating closely with the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA. Under agenda item 7, on United Nations technical cooperation activities, he would discuss the question of strengthening cooperation with UNDP and UNFPA, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and with input from the members of the Governing Council.

The meeting was suspended at noon and resumed at 12.10 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

(a) ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR 1990 AND PROGRAMME-LEVEL ACTIVITIES (DP/1991/28, Parts I-III, DP/1991/30, 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35)

16. Mrs. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) referred to a number of international agreements and to General Assembly resolution 45/216, entitled "Population and development", which stressed that the collective effort of all humankind would be essential in confronting the challenges of the 1990s. Achieving a better balance between population, available resources and development would require a strong political commitment to population issues and, above all, adequate resources. Resource mobilization was currently the highest priority of UNFPA.

17. Whether the current world population would double or triple would depend largely on whether further progress was achieved in slowing population growth rates during the 1990s. According to the 1990 revision of the United Nations medium-variant projection, world population, which currently stood at 5.4 billion, would reach 8.5 billion by the year 2025. Ninety-five per cent of that increase would occur in developing regions. Never in human history had population grown as rapidly as in sub-Saharan Africa, whose population of 501 million was expected to double in only 23 years. However, according to the report on the implementation of the strategy for UNFPA assistance to sub-Saharan Africa (DP/1991/33), there had been encouraging progress in such areas as population policy and development planning, maternal and child health and family planning, and other population activities. None the less, in a region which had posted the largest relative increases in population, enormous challenges remained. The situation was not helped by a bleak economic picture, which meant, inter alia, that resources for population activities were scarce.

18. With over 3 billion people, not only did Asia and the Pacific contain over 60 per cent of the world's population, but it was also a region of striking contrasts. Some of the greatest challenges in the region were posed by its continued rapid population growth rate - 1.8 per cent - and the low status of women, a key factor in the slow progress of population programmes in many Asian countries. In Asia and the Pacific, particularly in the South Asian region, maternal and child health and family planning must be consolidated, and stronger measures must be taken to enhance the role of women. That was indicated in a study of population programmes in South Asia, conducted by UNFPA in the past year.

19. In the Arab countries of the Middle East, where the total population was expected to reach 290 million by the end of the century, persistent high fertility rates were attributable to social and cultural factors such as early marriage, low levels of contraceptive use and widespread preference for large families. For demographic and health reasons, and in the interest of sustainable development, countries in the region were increasingly supporting maternal and child health and family planning programmes and comprehensive

population policies. None the less, efforts to improve maternal and child health and family planning services and the status of women still required support. In addition, increases in the number of displaced people (refugees), a rise in the proportion of female-headed households and large numbers of returned migrants had created new and pressing needs in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf crisis. In the Central and Eastern European countries, modern family planning programmes would be necessary in order to reduce the current reliance on induced abortions. There would also be a need for current and accurate data on international and internal migration flows in Europe.

20. In overall terms, Latin America was undergoing a demographic transition, marked by declines in mortality and fertility. Nearly all countries in the region had come to recognize the relevance of population policy; the region as a whole had made progress in building awareness of population issues and in changing attitudes towards family planning. Population variables had also become a fairly standard element in development planning. Population programmes, however, remained fragile, and certain problems had not yet been addressed by some countries in the region. For example, abortion ranked as the first or second leading cause of very high maternal mortality in most countries. In addition, unwanted pregnancies among adolescents continued to escalate; rural-to-urban migration continued to accelerate; and structural adjustment programmes had been unable to cope with social and economic setbacks caused by macroeconomic imbalances.

21. Urgent action must be taken on population issues. That message was underscored by new population projections from the United Nations; the recognition of linkages between population factors, environmental conditions and socio-economic development; and many international declarations and statements, including the New International Development Strategy, the report of the South Commission, the eighteenth special session of the General Assembly, the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries and the International Forum on Population in the Twenty-first Century.

22. The State of World Population, entitled "Choice or Chance?", issued by UNFPA in 1991, argued that internationally agreed population targets for the year 2000 could be achieved only if modern, voluntary planning services could be extended to about 2 billion people in developing countries in the 1990s. That meant not only enhancing the effectiveness of programmes, but also doubling the current level of expenditure.

23. The International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in 1994, would combine technical, policy and operational considerations in an unprecedented manner. The overall theme of the 1994 Conference would be population, sustained economic growth and sustainable development. The preparatory process would include, inter alia, regional meetings to be convened by the United Nations regional commissions, and six expert group meetings corresponding to six groups of issues identified for special

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attention. It had been suggested that the Conference should be financed, as far as possible, from the existing resources of relevant units of the United Nations system, in particular the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs and UNFPA. As Secretary-General of the Conference, she had already requested voluntary contributions from a number of Member States, and some of the initial responses had been favourable.

24. Reviewing the UNFPA documentation before the Council, she drew attention to the report on proposed UNFPA successor arrangements for agency support costs (DP/1991/35), which outlined the proposed new arrangements and their financial implications. The paramount aim was to promote national capacity and self-reliance, and the major premises included support for national execution of projects, implementation of the programme approach, decentralization, strengthening of technical back-stopping capabilities, and accountability of partners in the tripartite Government/executing agency/UNFPA relationship. The UNFPA proposal would facilitate a more integrated and coordinated approach, and help channel the technical and analytical inputs of the United Nations system for the benefit of operational activities. The proposal clearly distinguished technical from administrative support, and promoted more timely and more effective technical assistance to countries, changes that were absolutely essential for future population programming. UNFPA believed the proposed new arrangements would be more cost-effective than the current one.

25. The report on contraceptive requirements and demand for contraceptive commodities in developing countries in the 1990s (DP/1991/34) reviewed projections of contraceptive requirements and local production issues, and discussed distribution of contraceptives and the cost of contraceptive requirements, which would amount to about $5 billion by the year 2000. Clearly, resource mobilization was essential.

26. The report on implementation of the strategy for UNFPA assistance to sub-Saharan Africa (DP/1991/33) provided financial data on support from UNFPA, donors and Governments, examined the progress made from 1987 to 1990, and identified problems and constraints. The progress in Africa had been remarkable, with a notable trend towards government policies in favour of more balanced population growth. Similarly, some birth-spacing and family-planning counselling and services were currently available in practically all African countries. While the countries themselves were clearly responsible for the advances, the UNFPA strategy had helped generate momentum. The most serious obstacle, however, was the lack of funds for population activities at a time when the African countries were ready to move ahead.

27. The status report on the implementation strategy to strengthen the capacity of the Fund to deal with issues concerning women, population and development (DP/1991/32), focusing on the previous two years in each of the six principal areas of activity under the strategy, concluded that it had been successful in furthering UNFPA capacity to deal with gender concerns, had had

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a discernible affect on awareness, advocacy, agency collaboration and increased programme expenditures in the areas in question, and had also had a positive influence on some of the Fund's major priorities and on its personnel management. The report recommended that the strategy should be continued for four more years, with special emphasis on components such as training programmes, reporting mechanisms, technical assistance and links with local non-governmental organizations. UNFPA believed that improving the status of women was perhaps the single most important element in attaining sustained and sustainable development.

28. The work plan for 1992-1995 and request for approval authority (DP/1991/30) provided information on the Fund's resource situation, its overall resource utilization and the distribution of programmable resources among country and intercountry activities and services.

29. The biennial budget estimates for administrative and programme support services for the 1992-1993 biennium and revised budget estimates for the 1990-1991 biennium (DP/1991/36) had been based on very conservative assessments and been held to a minimum. In terms of staff, special emphasis had been put on field-office needs, in keeping with the Fund's notable expansion in country programmes and in line with the UNFPA policy of decentralization. UNFPA could deliver its programme only if it had the minimum required resources, both financial and human, and it pledged to continue to improve its management and administration and to streamline programming.

30. The Standing Committee for Programme Matters would have before it 14 comprehensive country programmes, one programme for a subregion and the proposed UNFPA intercountry programme for 1992-1995.

31. Turning to a brief overview of the UNFPA programme in 1990 and to some highlights of 1991, she observed that while the Fund's financial situation was sound, programme needs far exceeded available resources; at the end of 1990, for the first time in its history, UNFPA had had no unspent allocation to carry forward. The 1990 contributions to UNFPA general resources had increased by almost 14 per cent over 1989, while income had increased by almost 15 per cent. There had been 106 donors in 1990, and 29 countries had increased their contributions by 9 per cent or more, with the most substantial increases having been made by Australia, Denmark, Finland, France, New Zealand and Spain. Cumulative pledges in 1990 had totalled $2.2 billion. In addition, over $10.5 million had been contributed by various donors in 1990 to the Fund's multi-bilateral programme. Unfortunately, the United States Government, which had not contributed since 1985, had chosen once again not to do so, thus seriously undermining UNFPA's ability to respond to the dramatically increased needs for assistance in poorer countries. In 1991, the five-per-cent increase in contributions had been far from what was urgently needed to expand population programmes to meet the critical and alarming needs of developing countries. She appealed to the Fund's traditional major donors

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and to all countries to increase their support in order to enable it to reach the necessary goal of an 18-per-cent annual increase in contributions throughout the 1990s.

32. As indicated in part I of the report of the Executive Director for 1990 (DP/1991/28), project allocations had increased in 1990 by 8.6 per cent, the resource utilization rate stood provisionally at 101.9 per cent and there had been no carry-forwards. Family planning and associated information, education and communication activities had continued to receive the largest share of UNFPA resources, over 63 per cent, reflecting the strong tendency of countries to move ahead with action programmes.

33. She referred the Council to the annual report of the Executive Director (DP/1991/28 (Parts I, II and III)) regarding issues such as evaluation of UNFPA programmes, staff training and development, activities concerning women, population and development, technical cooperation among developing countries and special programme interests, including HIV/AIDS. She drew attention to a special section in part III on the implementation of modified criteria in designating priority countries, where the conclusion was that the current revised system was working very well and needed no changes. The system had enabled the Fund to devote about 75 per cent of its country programme resources to priority countries, with the target in coming years being 80 per cent.

34. Turning to special concerns of UNFPA, she said that in the area of programme development, UNFPA's mission was to help countries, at their request, to formulate an informed and strategic long-term framework for the various components of an overall national strategy. To that end, the Fund had continued in 1990 to decentralize up to 50 per cent of approval authority to country directors in the field, and to improve its programme review and strategy development approach. Governments had begun to use the main recommendations in the programme review and strategy development reports as a primary policy instrument and as the basis for discussions with donors regarding priority areas for support. In certain countries, the result had been the adoption of a population policy and specific demographic and social goals, or the clarification of priorities leading to the refinement of a policy or a programme. In 1991, about 30 programme review and strategy development exercises would be conducted, and the entire process would be evaluated in depth.

35. Another key UNFPA concern, reviewed in part III of the annual report (DP/1991/28), was collaboration and coordination with all UNFPA's partners. Working with the United Nations resident coordinators, the Fund had coordinated the assessment of contraceptive requirements and demand for contraceptive commodities in developing countries in the 1990s. At the programme level, it had sought to ensure regular exchanges with other United Nations organizations and with donors, prior to making important programming decisions, and had synchronized its own programming cycles with those of

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Governments and its partner agencies, particularly UNDP and UNICEF. In the area of maternal and child health and family planning, the Fund was cooperating with WHO in focusing on selected high-priority countries, and with UNICEF in programming at the field level. A joint WHO/UNICEF/UNDP/UNFPA letter on maternal and child health and family planning, introduced on her initiative, and the common goals agreed by WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA were further guiding and energizing the process of coordination. The Fund, also on her initiative, had renewed collaboration with the World Bank and the regional development banks. Collaborative agreements had, in addition, been developed with various non-governmental organizations in the population field. The United Nations Volunteers programme was another important UNFPA partner in its field operations. The Fund continued to participate in the work of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy, and to promote several of the Group's initiatives at the country level.

36. The linkages between population and environment were yet another special area of current concern for UNFPA, which had been active in ensuring that the issue was adequately reflected in the agenda of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The Fund also looked forward to collaborating with the United Nations Environment Programme in developing a major project to overlay population patterns with information on ecologically-endangered zones provided through cartographic and remote-sensing technologies, in order to target areas most in need of assistance and draw up guidelines for inter-agency collaboration.

37. Lastly, UNFPA sought constantly to improve its own human resources through better managerial practices, staff training, improved career development, and rotation between field and headquarters and between assignments, with emphasis on effective delegation, decentralization and communication.

38. There was an imperative need to slow population growth in those many countries where it was not in balance with available resources and prospects for development. Yet development issues were not confined to developing countries, there being a global interdependence with respect to the environment, world trade and economic performance, and population. To address adequately any of the many crises at the beginning of the Fourth Development Decade, it was essential to take the population factor into account. The potential for decisive action in the population field had never been greater than it now was.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.